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Law School News

Professor of the Year: Tara Allen

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May 14, 2020 Michael M. Bowden



RWU Law Professor of the Year Tara Allen.

Tara I. Allen, RWU Law Associate Professor of Law, has been voted by the Class of 2020 as Professor of the Year!

When she joined the full-time faculty in 2018, Professor Allen was already a familiar face to many in the Roger Williams family: she had been earning rave reviews as an adjunct for several years, and also served as an externship supervisor for RWU Law students placed in the federal defenders office.

“When Professor Allen formally joined our faculty, we knew she would be a popular teacher,” said Dean Michael J. Yelnosky. But she exceeded already high expectations with her extraordinary responsiveness to student feedback and ideas, constantly refining her approach to provide optimal learning experiences.

“Recently, she has experimented with integrating numerous simulation exercises into even her large enrollment courses,” Yelnosky noted. “Her willingness to adjust her approach to better educate her students is indicative of the commitment that the graduates honored when they selected her as Professor of the Year.”

Professor Allen herself, however, was taken totally by surprise.

“As a member of the law school’s junior faculty, I am honored — and floored — that the Class of 2020 chose me as its Professor of the Year,” she said.

But she acknowledged that her approach to legal education is very much a two-way street.

“What I love most about teaching is showing students how to find their own voices rather than insisting that they parrot back mine,” Allen explained. The Class of 2020, she added, was especially open to this sort of dialogue.

“This class embraced my rather nontraditional teaching methods, and trusted themselves enough to step boldly into that space between mystery and mastery of the law,” Professor Allen said. “While many of us anticipate that this year’s graduates will be tasked in unique ways post-COVID-19, I fervently believe that our law school community has equipped them to overcome any challenges that lay ahead. I can hardly wait to see their future successes!”

Before joining RWU Law, Professor Allen was an Assistant Federal Defender for the Federal District of Rhode Island from 2012, representing indigent defendants in federal criminal proceedings of all kinds. Prior to that, she was a trial attorney for federal defenders’ offices in the Western District of Pennsylvania and the Eastern District of California. She has also served as staff counsel in the U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Ninth and Second Circuits. In addition, Allen has more than a dozen years of teaching experience, including stints at U.C. Hastings and McGeorge School of Law.

At RWU Law, Allen teaches Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, and Evidence. She earned her B.A. from Wesleyan University and her J.D. from Northeastern.